Fatty Liver Disease: What You Need to Know

Fatty liver disease is a condition in which there is too much fat stored in the liver. In this handout, you will learn about fatty liver disease, including symptoms, diagnosis and treatment.

WHAT IS FATTY LIVER DISEASE?

Fatty liver disease (also called non-alcoholic fatty liver disease) is a condition in which too much fat is stored in the liver. The extra fat can cause the liver to become inflamed (swollen) or irritated. It can also cause cirrhosis (when scar tissue forms in the liver).

WHAT DOES YOUR LIVER DO?

Your liver filters blood from your stomach and intestines before spreading it throughout the rest of your body.

WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENT TYPES OF FATTY LIVER DISEASE?

- **Steatosis** is when there is only fat in the liver. There is no inflammation or scarring.

- **Steatohepatitis** (also called NASH disease) is when the fat stored in the liver causes inflammation. In some cases, it can also cause scarring.

**Did you know...?**

Fatty liver disease can lead to serious liver conditions like end-stage liver disease, liver cancer and cirrhosis. It is important to diagnose and treat fatty liver disease early on. This way, your child has a lower risk or developing serious liver conditions.

WHAT CAUSES FATTY LIVER DISEASE?

Doctors are not sure what causes fatty liver disease. But there are certain things that can raise your child’s risk of developing it, such as:

- Having overweight or obesity, especially around the waist
- Having diabetes or insulin resistance
- High levels of fats in the blood
- Being white, Hispanic or Native American
- Being male

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF FATTY LIVER DISEASE?

Some children do not have any symptoms of fatty liver disease. Call the doctor if your child develops any of these fatty liver symptoms:

- Pain in the upper right part of the belly
- Feeling tired or weak
- Jaundice (yellowing of the skin or eyes)
- Higher levels of liver enzymes in the blood
- Liver or spleen (a small organ that helps filter blood) that is larger than normal
- Shortness of breath, especially with exercise
HOW DO DOCTORS DIAGNOSE FATTY LIVER DISEASE?
Doctors diagnose fatty liver disease through different tests. It is important to diagnose fatty liver disease as early as possible.

- Review of your child’s medical history
- A physical exam
- Review of your child’s risk factors for developing the condition
- Blood tests
- Imaging tests, such as an X-ray or MRI
- Liver biopsy (when doctors use a small needle to test a small piece of your child’s liver)

HOW DO DOCTORS TREAT FATTY LIVER DISEASE?
The goal of any fatty liver treatment is to lower the amount of extra fat in the liver. The doctor will talk with you about the best treatments for your child.

Fatty liver disease treatment can include:

- Creating a diet and exercise plan
- Weight loss
- Advice on nutrition
- Medications
- In some cases, weight loss surgery